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AUTHOR Leming, James S.
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ABSTRACT

Interpretations from a body of research on the influence of social studies curriculum on socio-moral development are presented. Research areas in the socio-moral domain commonly focus on a moral dilemma discussion approach, classroom climate and controversial issues in the social studies, community service/social action, and cooperative learning. Four potential interpretations of research focusing on the development of reasoning about political questions and research with a focus on democratic political orientations include: (1) the trivial findings interpretation, which suggests that the influence of social studies programs in the socio-moral domain are trivial and completely without educational or social significance; (2) the resistant variables interpretation, which holds that because the areas of attitudes and values are among the most resistant to change, any positive influence is detected as significant; (3) the small but socially significant interpretation, which is built around the observation that sometimes small changes found as a result of an interpretation may have important social significance; and (4) the developmental interpretation, which assumes that political reasoning and attitudes are developmental in nature; thus small gains might be interpreted as steps toward more mature and democratic forms of belief and reasoning. A summary of the arguments of a variety of authors suggests the idea that should citizenship education be effective in its goal of producing an entire population of rational/activist citizens, unintended consequences may result that actually conflict with basic democratic values. (LH)

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SOCIAL STUDIES RESEARCH AND THE POTENTIAL FOR EXCELLENCE IN SOCIAL EDUCATION

James S. Leming
Curriculum, Instruction and Media
Southern Illinois University
Carbondale, IL 62901

SO 016 607

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Social Studies Research and the Potential for Excellence in Social Education

James S. Leming

Southern Illinois University

This past year I completed a review of research on the influence of social studies curriculum on socio-moral development (Leming, 1985). As frequently happens in my writing a combination of poor time usage, fatique and an inflexible publication deadline left the conclusions and implications section of the paper somewhat brief and incomplete. In this paper I will more fully explore what these findings suggest regarding the nature of research in social studies education, our understanding of what the social studies should be, and the standards that should guide its practice.

The review alluded to above covers the time period of 1976-1984. Its purpose was to review the literature on the influence of social studies curriculum on the social orientations of students. By social orientations I refer to students' reasoning, attitudes, dispositions, and behaviors regarding social life. In this review I limited myself to areas where more than one or two isolated studies existed. As a result, the four areas of research selected are ones that have achieved a base from which one can, with some degree of assurance, draw generalizations. I will not in this paper report the results of areas where the research is notoriously poor (eg values clarification) or areas where only isolated studies exist (eg values analysis). For each

of the four areas identified I will briefly describe the nature of the instructional practice under study, the outcomes analyzed in the studies, and the general pattern and magnitude of findings. The reporting of the findings will necessarily be brief. Anyone wishing the original review may write me at the address on the coversheet. I will also be happy to supply the citations supporting any given generalization.

RESEARCH AREAS IN THE SOCIO-MORAL DOMAIN

Moral Dilemma Discussion Approach

By this time most professional educators are well familiar with the nature of the Kohlbergian approach to moral development and the implicatons for social studies education. The approach claims that there exist five naturally occuring stages of moral reasoning that comprise an invariant developmental sequence. The essential conditions for moral development consist of cognitive disequilibrium (through deliberation about moral dilemmas) and exposure to reasoning at the next highest stage. Kohlberg claims that the higher stages are morally better stages and as a result stimulating cognitive development is a desirable educational goal.

The research reviewed involved the incorporation of the discussion of moral dilemmas on a weekly basis within the regular school curriculum. Stage of moral reasoning (the dependent variable) was typically ascertained by the scoring of a

recorded transcript of student response to interviewer probes of responses to a moral dilemma or by an objective assessment of moral judgment (the Defining Issues Test).

In the literature the interview data is referred to as the Moral Judgment Interview. Although student responses are occasionally reported as a global (modal) score, most commonly responses are reported as a moral maturity score (MMS). Reporting the data in this form yields a score between 100 (pure stage one) and 500 (pure stage five). The MMS is a mean statistic and as a result is an average of a number of responses and the same score in two different subjects may reflect either a homogeneous or heterogenous pattern of subject reasoning.

The research suggests that the stimulation of development in moral reasoning is an achievable goal. In approximately 50 percent of the studies identified the regular discussion of moral dilemmas in the classroom resulted in significant upward change in MMS. If one eliminates studies of duration of less that one semester, percentage of successful treatments rises to around 70 percent. If one further eliminates from the longer studies those that incorporate moral dilemmas dealing with religious issues and questions of sexual morality 90 percent of the studies find upward stage movement. The magnitude of change ranges between 1/7 and 1/2 stage or between 15 and 50 points on a 400 point scale (4-12 percent of the scales range).

Thoma (1984) has completed a review of literature on the effect of the dilemma discussion approach in studies that utilized the Defining Issues Test, an objective paper and pencil

measure of moral reasoning. Thoma assessed the power of the treatment by using the standard effect size statistic. This statistic, effect size, represents the magnitude of treatment effects in a standard score form (a percentage of standard deviation from pre to post test). In the analysis of 40 studies it was found that overall the magnitude of the effect was small (d=.28). This effect size increases, however, as those studies of weak design are eliminated (ie studies of short duration or not pointedly focused on moral dilemmas). Thoma also found that the effect size was greatest for adult and college age youth while studies using high school and junior high youth yielded effect sizes of .23 and .22, respectively.

Classroom Climate and Controversial Issues in the Social Studies

Social studies classrooms may have a desirable influence on student attitudes provided there exists regular discussion of controversial issues, a classroom climate where students feel free to express their opinions, and a teacher that actively solicits and positively values student contributions. While compared with the research on the moral discussion approach this body of research consists of far fewer studies with more dependent variables, some general trends emerge from the research. Generally, the incorporation of controversial issues as a part of the social studies classroom fosters more respect for civil liberties and has a positive impact on students political attitudes. The attitudes most commonly measured are: political trust--belief that human behavior is constant and governed by

positive emotions; social/political integration--belief that one is connected, not alienated from one's environment; political interest--one is predisposed to respond positively to political matters; and political efficacy--belief that one's actions can have an effect on the political environment. The attitudes in this body of literature are typically measured by a five point Likert scale with students responding to items such as "People like me can influence political decisions." The findings from this body of literature are reported in a variety of ways such as Z-scores, group means, or percent of subjects at one end of a scale. Also, the number and makeup of items comprising a given scale vary widely. Nevertheless, the pattern of findings is consistent. Usually, on all political attitude variables with the exception of political efficacy (confidence), small positive increases in attitudes were detected. After courses that involved discussion of controversial issues students became slightly less confident about their ability to influence on political events. One author, Ehman (1980) attributes this declining efficacy to a sense of political realism.

A related body of research focuses on the influence of democratic classrooms and democratically run alternative schools on the political attitudes of students. These studies generally found that sense of political efficacy and interest were slightly enhanced; however, a small but significant increase in cynicism was also detected.

Community Service/Social Action

The programs reviewed in this section place students outside of the school and in the community where they assume participatory roles with real social consequences. These roles, depending upon the type of program, range from performing public service activities to participation intended to influence social/ political policy or action. The rationale for such programs typically anticipate one or more of the following outcomes: the development of positive attitudes related to civic and political participation, the acquisition of relevant interpersonal, intellectual, and political action skills, and increased desire for participation in civic life. The research on this approach to social education comes from these primary sources: Jones (1974), Conrad and Hedin (1981), and Newmann and Rutter (1983). Jones found only a slight positive influence of such program on efficacy on measures of political awareness, perception of public officials and desire to be a public official. The Conrad and Hedin study found slight increases favoring experiential programs on moral reasoning, sense of duty, concern for others, sense of efficacy, and responsible action. The Newmann and Rutter review, however, is critical of the Conrad and Hedin study questioning the statistical treatment of the data and pointing out that the comparison group scores declined from pre-test to post-test on every variable, thereby increasing the probability of achieving positive results for program students.

The Newmann and Rutter study examined the impact of community service programs in eight schools. The variables measured were taken from a researcher constructed test of sense of community

and school responsibility, sense of social competence, political efficacy, anticipated future community involvement, and anticipated future political participation. The study concluded that community service programs increase students' sense of community responsibility and sense of personal competence in a very modest way (mean movement of about 1.5 percent of the range of a five point scale), but have no impact on the other variables studied.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is a recent approach that has accumulated an impressive body of research that suggests promise for social education. The approach (Slavin, 1983) attempts to redress what is seen as an over emphasis on competitive and individualistic structures in schooling by placing students in cooperative learning situations. Typically groups of four to five students are comprised in such a way as to include a wide range of academic, social and racial backgrounds and students are rewarded for the success of the group as a whole. The extensive field based research can be summarized as follows: cooperative learning methods in general, when compared with individualistic and competitive methods, produce greater academic learning, better intergroup relations among black, white, and Hispanic students, enhanced self-esteem, improved relationships between mainstreamed academically handicapped students and normal progress students, general mutual concern and interpersonal trust among students and increased propensity for prosocial behavior.

While the magnitude of the effect size is comparable with the other research reported, the consistency of the findings is dramatic.

INTERPRETING THE RESEARCH

Any research findings are socially meaningless until they are placed within a framework consisting of agreed upon purpose and value regarding the nature of education. For example, the finding that the experience of social studies classroom x results in a mean change in variable y among students becomes meaningful only within a framework from which importance is attached to finding y based on some view of y's relationship to some desired personal or social end-state (value). Once this framework from which the interpretation takes place is established a further question concerning the significance of the magnitude of the change in the variables must be addressed. That is, once it is agreed that variables of the sort y are valid outcomes (goals) for social education then one must decide upon what constitutes significant change as a result of a curricular intervention. It is my position that the nature of what constitutes an educationally and socially significant finding needs clarification. In addition, the relationship between the variables utilized in the research and the goals of social education are in need of more careful examination. In the remainder of this paper I will address these two questions. In this discussion I will limit myself to that research which focuses on the development of reasoning about political questions and

research with a focus on democratic political orientations, eg political efficacy, interest, trust, and participation. I impose this limitation to give the remaining sections focus and because of the alleged relationship of these variables to the traditional social studies goal of citizenship.

I turn first to the question of the significance of the findings. It appears to me that there are four potential interpretations regarding the question of the educational and social significance of the changes found:

1. The trivial findings interpretation. The research findings suggest that the influence of social studies programs in the socio-moral domain are trivial and completely without educational or social significance. This perspective holds that the magnitude of the changes are so small that no reasonable case can be made for continuing the investment of time and energy expended on any given approach. Not only has it been shown that the changes are miniscule, but the research has also failed to demonstrate that these changes persist after the treatment ends or establish any link between the paper and pencil data collected and real-world social or political behavior. Given these findings the profession would best use its time and energy concentrating on what it does best, increasing student knowledge.

2. The resistant variables interpretation. It is granted that the changes detected in the research are small, however, given the nature of the variables this is not unexpected. Behavioral science research has long found the areas of attitudes and values to be among the most resistant to change. With the

well established potent influence of the home and the somewhat less influential but pervasive influence of media and culture it would appear unrealistic to expect schooling experiences to dramatically impact on political attitudes. The fact that any positive influence is detected is encouraging and sufficient warrent for holding the intervention as effective.

3. The small but socially significant interpretation. This interpretation is built around the observation that sometimes the small changes found as a result of an intervention may have great social signifcance. The best example of this line of argument comes from the field of medical research. Gage's (1984) recent discussion of small effects in teaching effectiveness research makes this medical analogy. One study cited by Gage is the research reporting that through restriction in cholesterol and treatment with drugs the incidence of heart attack can be reduced. Although the above treatment produced only a 1.7 percent reduction in heart attacks and accounted for only .1 percent of the variance in heart attacks the study was widely cited as of profound significance for the practice of medicine. If we can argue that the changes found in social studies research are of equal social significance then the research in the field takes on a much more salutary appearance.

4. The developmental interpretation. This interpretation assumes that political reasoning and attitudes are developmental in nature, that is, they proceed through an invariant progression of stages from an immature egocentric perspective to the highest stages where attitudes and reasoning of individuals are consistent

with and supportive of the highest principles of our constitutional democratic system of government. From this perspective one would positively interpret the small gains induced as a result of different social studies interventions as making an essential contribution to the democratic development of youth. The small increments observed are seen as essential steps toward more mature and democratic forms of belief and reasoning. Since development is invariant and progressive these small gains will not be lost, but rather are a small socially significant step toward a desirable goal of develomentally mature populace that possesses a sophisticated understanding of our government and a deep affective allegiance to its principles. The Kohlbergian research easily fits the interpretation spelled out above. To attempt to fit political attitudes to this template is, as will be seen below, a much more difficult matter.

Which of the above interpretations is the most plausible? The trivial findings interpretation is probably the most distasteful to social studies researchers (for it suggests that real estate sales is a more socially productive career), but it is a difficult notion to dispel. The critical information needed to reject this proposal is longitudinal, that is, if it can be shown that these incremental changes persist over time or in some way accrete to that constellation of attributes we typically refer to as "good citizenship" then there exists non-trivial social value in the enterprise of social education. While there is some evidence to suggest that this may be the case, there is other evidence that suggests a sanguine mood is not in order. One piece

of encouraging research is found in Almond and Verba (1963) who found that the adults among their sample that scored highest in sense of political competence (believe that they are able to participate in politics) are those that with the greatest frequency remember that they could participate in class discussion. There is also a body of research that shows that active adult citizens report political and civic participation as youth. These findings are only suggestive; they are not longitudinal in nature and the exact nature of the youthful experiences are shrouded in the mists of the remembered past. True longitudinal studies on this issue are, to my knowledge, non-existent or unreliable. I could identify no study that precisely documents the nature of the student's social studies experiences and then follows up over time student political attitudes. The Ehman (1980) study referred to above followed students over a three year period (while they were in school) and found the open classroom climate factor accentuating development of selected political attitudes over time. Whether or not these attitude changes persisted after exposure to the open climate was not studied. Miller (1985) recently reported an analysis of the National Longitudinal Study of the Class of 1972 (sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education and the National Center for Educational Stastics) where he used the data base to explore the influence of high school social studies courses in youth adult political participation. In this sample of 16,000 subjects, data was collected seven years after high school graduation on reported political participation. His conclusion was that the number of

high school social studies classes taken has no significant influence on subsequent political participation. While the study addresses a most important question, the failure to describe the nature of the different experiences within the classes and lumping the sample into only two groups (two years of social studies and more than two years) suggest a cautious approach to the findings.

To sum up, the evidence does not warrent dismissing the first interpretation. There is some data, retrospective in nature, that suggests some lingering influence of school experiences on citizenship attitudes, but careful longitudinal data is needed before confidence can be placed in the possible relationships.

The resistant variables interpretation seems warrented. Attitudes are difficult to change and when one compares the school and its potential influence with that of the family, peers, and the cultural milieu, one must be conservative about what one can reasonably expect from social studies instruction in this regard. This interpretation, however, while making us less idealistic about what can be accomplished, does not establish any grounds for saying that the influence of social studies education on attitudes has social value, for the same possibility of ephemeral changes as discussed under the trivial interpretation persists.

The small but socially significant (medical analogy) interpretation is an engaging one, but unfortunately such a critical and significant outcome as preserving a human life simply does not exist in social studies research. While few will argue that development of commitment to democratic principles and

citizenship skills are not highly significant social outcomes, difficulty exists in showing that the social studies contributes in any meaningful and lasting way to that development. It is much like a M.D. trying to argue for the effectiveness of a given treatment for a disease by reporting immediately after administering the drug that the patient reported feeling better.

Finally, the developmental interpretation is at least partially encouraging. By now, from my perspective, one can say with confidence that in school settings it is possible to facilitate the development of moral reasoning. A variety of research studies have also shown that reasoning about political issues follows hand in hand with development in moral reasoning. Kohlberg has also shown that his highest stage of moral reasoning (stage five) embodies the morality of the U.S. Constitution, and to fully understand our constitution requires the highest attainable stage. Therefore, since the small changes noted in dilemma discussion classrooms are irreversible and provide the foundation for subsequent growth, and since they lead to a fuller understanding and appreciation of our democratic constitutional system of government, one can establish some social value for the achievement of these outcomes. However, this reasoning is cognitive in nature, and a still unanswered question concerning the relationship between reasoning, attitudes, and social behavior remains.

With regard to political attitudes, it seems obvious that one cannot talk about them in any strict developmental sense. It cannot be said that there exists an invariant, progressive

sequence of attitudes toward some end state, for it makes perfect sense to talk about loosing interest, loosing one's sense of efficacy, loosing the desire to participate, and developing mistrust. In addition, Jennings and Niemi (1981) demonstrate clearly that historical factors such as the war in Vietnam and Watergate have had significant negative influence on factors such as political trust. In this study a parent and youth panel between 1965 and 1973, in response to the statement "Government is run for the benefit of all the people" fell from 87 and 75 percent agreement respectively in 1965 to 39 and 45 percent agreement in 1973. In addition, a comparison of the responses of the 1965 and 1973 senior classes found 78 percent agreement among the 1965 class, and only 36 percent agreement in 1973. Clearly, historical events can have significant negative impact on political attitudes. Thus, I conclude that while the developmental interpretation may offer some solace regarding cognitive goals it cannot account for outcomes in the area of political attitudes. It should be pointed out, however, that a body of literature exists that suggests there may be developmental perspectives appropriate to social education. Work by Durio (1976), Hogan and Mills (1976), Rawls (1971), Durkheim (1973), Tapp and Kohlberg (1971), and Dynneson and Gross (1985) offer differing perspectives of a developmental nature on educating for citizenship. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to attempt a developmental perspective on the affective and behavioral dimensions of citizenship, the area is one in need of analytic and empirical exploration.

STANDARDS AND THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES

Setting standards for the practice of social studies education toward which we strive as a profession and by which we are held accountable by society is essentially a question of values and not of research. That is, the educational process is designed by society and serves societal needs. The standards set for schools inevitably reflect the values of a given society. Thus, in the United States our democratic system of government requires citizens with knowledge, attitudes and behavior suitable for life in a democracy. As a result, the traditional and persisting emphasis in social studies education is on citizenship.

The research summarized in this paper cannot, nor should it, attempt to determine the debate over what the standards for social studies should be. The research can, however, illuminate the dialogue over the feasibility of achieving the standards chosen. Finally, if the profession is to be held accountable by society for its performance vis a vis these standards, research will inevitably shape this evaluation. Thus, standards represent a two-edged sword for the profession. On the one hand they reflect society's values, give direction and purpose to teachers and schools, and enlist public support for the endeavor. On the other hand, we are also judged publically by the extent to which we achieve those standards.

Excellence is the state of possessing good qualitites in an eminent degree. Excellence in social studies education as traditionally pictured consists of practices that produce

citizens possessing in an eminent degree citizenship knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that excellence may not be an achievable goal in social studies education if we continue to hold to a rational-activist/New England town meeting model of what it means to be a good citizen. It seems to me that the social studies profession is involved in an inescapable paradox concerning this issue. That is, the higher we set our sights, the greater the inevitable gap between standards and outcomes. This paradox of citizenship education will not be easily resolved by newer, more effective strategies, for the root of the relative stability of political attitudes is largely outside of the influence of the profession. If the profession is hard pressed to demonstrate that it has any significant influence on other than cognitive outcomes, should the social studies continue to hold itself accountable for these outcomes? The question I wish to raise in the remainder of the paper is whether or not the social studies should set more modest standards for itself, namely focusing on cognitive goals. In order to make this case requires the demonstration that a more limited view on citizenship will not place democracy at risk. Below I briefly summarize the arguments of a variety of authors whose observations suggest a more modest view of the goals of citizenship education are consistent with our current system of government:

(1) Increased citizen competence may result in greater social and economic inequality. If all interests in society

effectively use their resources what hope is there for the downtrodden? (Weissberg, 1981). Class differences will likely be further exacerbated. Higher economic status children are more predisposed to participation in the first place (Miller, 1985 and Verba and Nie, 1972) and will be better able to master citizenship competencies. The inevitable result will be that lower S.E.S. class interests will be blunted.

(2) Active citizenship conceptions of democracy rest on unrealistic grounds in that it ignores the general desire to absolve oneself of decision making responsibility in favor of protective decisions of a leader. The most important element of democratic system is not citizen participation in all aspects of social and political life, but rather is in the election process through which non-elites choose governing elites. The public's role is to verify that their political elites are practicing self or group interests (Dahl, 1956). Democracy best functions as a competition among decisionmakers for public support. (Schumpeter, 1962). Our system doesn't depend on and doesn't require increased citizen participation. In fact, it runs better without it. Witness the recent litigation explosion. Has increased citizen activism resulted in a more just society?

(3) The politically apathy of the public is a plus in that it prevents those with limited interest and expertise from creating undue stress on the system. Those with the least democratic attitudes participate the least. Non-participation is

a positive goal in that it presents those with limited interest and expertise from creating undue stress on the system (Berelson, 1952).

(4) Participation and citizenship skills are normally associated with liberal or enlightened policies, however, there is no guarantee that increased participation might not result in more authoritarian and repressive policies as in the troika of Jesse Helms, Jerry Falwell, and Phyllis Schafley (Weissberg, 1981).

The arguments summarized above suggest that should citizenship education be effective in its goal of producing an entire population of rational/activist citizens unintended consequences may result that conflict with basic democratic values. It is somewhat puzzling that this view of citizenship, which has such dramatic implications for the conceptualization of social studies education, is seldom discussed by a profession committed to critical inquiry.

If we are held to be publically accountable for fostering political attitudes and citizen skills in youth we currently will have a difficult time making our case based on available research. It is always possible that new, more effective strategies will be developed or improved evaluation techniques will allow us to better document the effectiveness of current programs. Clearly, increasing student knowledge and facilitating cognitive development are goals that the profession can achieve. Attempting

to influence future citizens' attitudes and behaviors is a much more complex and difficult task and one which the costs and benefits of the energies expended must receive careful attention.

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